

## What is an Adolescent Offender Program (AOP)?

AOPs provide adjudicated youth with serious emotional disturbances an alternative to detainment, and instead, the opportunity to receive the mental health and substance use services necessary to make positive choices and prevent reentry into the juvenile justice system.

#### Goals of the AOP

- 1. To provide an alternative to incarceration and/or prevent the need for inappropriate psychiatric institutionalization for juvenile offenders with serious emotional disturbances
- 2. To address mental health and/or substance use issues utilizing an evidence-based curriculum in a day treatment setting
- 3. To provide the necessary mental health services and supports for each youth referred to the program
- 4. To have the young person exit the program with the skills and/or tools (information for accessing resources in the future, etc.) necessary to function successfully at the next level appropriate for the youth and to remain out of the juvenile justice system as she or he enters young adulthood

## The basic structure of the AOP

- Operates using a <u>day treatment model</u> an intensive community-based service certified by the Department of Mental Health for children and youth with serious emotional disturbances(SED) whose symptoms and behaviors could possibly require acute or residential intervention without frequent and more intensive mental health treatment.
- Requires an evidence-based curriculum
- Additional services are provided to meet the needs of youth referred to the program (e.g. substance use education and/or therapy). Access to staff specializing in substance use issues as well as education on the harmful effects of substance use are included in this program.
- The ratio of staff is 2:10.
- The day treatment specialist/therapist must have a master's degree and either a license or a DMH credential.
- Each CMHC/provider will operate at least one AOP in their catchment area and will collaborate with the Youth Court Judge and staff to determine days and times the program will meet (AOPs are required to operate at least 2 days per week, 2 hours per day up to 5 days per week, 5 hours a day.) The program will meet the same days and times each week.

How does a child get into the program (i.e. referral, court order, etc.)

 Youth are referred to the Adolescent Offender Program (AOP) by a Youth Court Judge or Referee to meet mental health needs and as an alternative to incarceration at the juvenile detention center or other consequences.

## Criteria for admission/acceptance into the AOP

- All youth must have a serious emotional disturbance/disorder (SED) or a mental health challenge listed in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9-CM) or the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual or Mental Disorders (DSM). If an SED is suspected but not yet diagnosed, an assessment can be administered by the CMHC to determine if an SED is present.
- Youth must be referred by a Youth Court Judge or Referee.
- Youth who have committed status offenses, misdemeanors, or other non-violent offenses are appropriate for this program; Violent offenders are not appropriate for the AOP.
- Youth must be between the ages of 12 and 17, but not older than 18 years of age.

# Length of program

 Youth remain in the AOP program until goals on the Individual Service Plan developed by the youth and mental health therapist have been achieved and/or the youth has been released by the Youth Court Judge or Referee to continue traditional outpatient treatment. When the program meets (i.e. after school, during school, etc.)

 Adolescent Offender Programs will traditionally meet after school unless otherwise arranged by the CMHC and Youth Court. The location of the program is determined by the Youth Court and the CMHC.

# Will transportation be provided?

 Funding was included in each budget to provide transportation to the Adolescent Offender Program and to the youth's home. Transportation will be decided upon and arranged by the CMHC.



## Cost of program to participant

There is no cost to the participant for referral to and enrollment in the Adolescent Offender Program.

- Adolescent Offender Programs are required to utilize an evidence-based curriculum specifically focused on issues, strategies and interventions for youth in juvenile justice.
- Physician/psychiatric services and traditional therapies are provided including group, individual, and family therapy and Community Support Services. Parent/Caregiver and/or Youth Peer Support Services may also be made available.
- A substance use therapist/counselor is available to provide education, support and therapy, if needed.
- Other activities related to improving mental health can also be provided art, non-traditional therapies, etc.).

What activities, programs will the children be participating in during the program?

Does everyone go through the same program, or is the program individualized for each youth?  Each youth has an Individual Service Plan, so services are individualized based on the needs of each youth. All AOP programs are required to utilize an evidence- based curriculum for group therapy. Therapeutic activities are also group-based.

# How long does the program last?

- The length of the program will be specific to each youth.
- Participation, progress and achievement of individualized treatment goals determine the length of the program for each youth.
- With continuous collaboration and communication between the DYS youth court counselor and the CMHC day treatment specialist, the Youth Court Judge or Referee is aware of the progress of each youth and will determine release from the AOP to a lower level of care.



# Is there a graduation for successful completion?

 Graduation ceremonies and related activities are welcome and encouraged and will be determined by the CMHC and Youth Court. How does the program communicate with the court the successes or difficulties a youth may be having?

 The AOP therapist and youth court counselor communicate frequently about the successes and challenges of each youth in the program. Information regarding progress is relayed to the Youth Court Judge or Referee.